

FIRST CHAPTER

Examination of Conditions

The first verse of chapter one introduces the first part of the *Fundamental Wisdom*: describing the lack of inherent existence of dependent arising. This section sets forth the selflessness of both phenomena and persons; chapter one explains the emptiness of phenomena through an examination of agency and action with respect to a cause and its effect.

The *Fundamental Wisdom* reads:

1.
**Neither from itself nor from another
Nor from both
Nor without cause
Does anything, anywhere, ever arise.**

An alternative translation of the first verse is:

1.
**Not from itself, not from something different,
Not from both and not without a cause
Does any thing, anywhere,
ever arise.**

This verse presents the fourfold reasoning that establishes the emptiness of arising. Among the eight attributes of dependent arising, the two verses of homage of the *Fundamental Wisdom* mention the emptiness of ceasing first (**does not cease, does not arise**, and so forth). However, since it is easier to understand the lack of inherent existence of ceasing after having understood the lack of inherent existence of arising, the remaining verses of the *Fundamental Wisdom* explain the emptiness of arising first.

The meaning of the first verse is that an impermanent phenomenon does not arise inherently because (1) it does **not** arise **from itself**; (2) it does **not** arise **from something** inherently **different**; (3) it does **not** arise **from both**—itself and something inherently different—and (4) it does **not** arise **without a cause** since there is **no thing, anywhere** that **ever arises** in any of these four ways.

NON-THEISTIC SAMKHYA SCHOOL



According to the view of the non-theistic Samkhyas, since the sunflower seed and the resultant sunflower are of the same nature, the sunflower arises from its own nature and a non-manifest sunflower must exist at the time of its cause.

The last reason indicates that no external or internal impermanent phenomenon, at any place, at any time or owing to any philosophical system¹ ever arises from itself, from something inherently different, and so forth.

This four-part reason is called the *diamond slivers reasoning* (Tib. *rdo rje gzegs ma'i gtan tshigs*) because each reason is a powerful means of eliminating the root misconception.

Please note, that if an impermanent phenomenon's arising were to exist inherently, the phenomenon would arise either from a cause or without a cause. If it were to arise from a cause, it would arise from a cause that was (a) of the same nature as itself, (b) inherently different from it or (c) both—the same nature as itself and inherently different from it. Therefore, if arising were to exist inherently, there would be only four possibilities: an impermanent phenomenon would arise (1) from itself, (2) from something inherently different, (3) from both, or (4) without a cause.

These four extreme ways of arising are asserted by different Indian philosophical systems:

Arising from itself

The first possibility, arising from itself, is asserted by the school of the non-theistic Samkhyas (Tib: *grangs can lha med pa*), an ancient non-buddhist philosophical system that does not accept the existence of a creator god. The Samkhyas maintain that a result such as a sunflower, for example, arises from causes and conditions that are pervaded by a single primal substance (Skt. *prakrti*, Tib. *spyi gtso bo*).

¹ Buddhist philosophical systems such as the Chittamatra school, for instance, assert that impermanent phenomena arise from inherently different causes because according to them, all phenomena exist inherently. However, that doesn't mean that owing to or through the power of these philosophical schools, phenomena actually exist in such a way.

Therefore, the nature of its substantial cause, a sunflower seed, would be of the same nature as its cooperative conditions: water, warmth, and so forth. Likewise, the nature of the sunflower and the nature of its causes and conditions would also be the same.

As they accept that the sunflower seed and the sunflower are not the same, they are not saying that the sunflower arises from the sunflower itself. Nevertheless, when they assert that the sunflower arises from its seed and from its own nature—since they maintain that the two natures are the same—the sunflower must arise from its own nature and a non-manifest sunflower must exist at the time of its cause. This is how they uphold the notion of something arising from itself.

Refutation of arising from itself

The refutation of arising from itself (or from something that is of the same nature) is based on demonstrating the logical absurdities or consequences of this possibility:

If a sunflower existed at the time of the sunflower seed, it would follow that there would be no point for the sunflower to arise again, because the purpose of a phenomenon's arising is for it to attain its identity² as that phenomenon. However, if this identity has already been attained, there is no need for it to arise again.

Were the Samkhyas to reply that it is not contradictory for something to have attained its identity and still have to arise, the following absurd consequence would ensue:

It would follow that arising would be endless, for the sunflower would arise again and again. This is because according to the Samkhyas, although the sunflower has already attained its identity at the time of its seed, it arises again.

Furthermore, if the sunflower were to arise again and again, the arising of the sunflower seed would also be endless, since the sunflower seed would likewise already exist at the time of its cause. Therefore, the sunflower would never be produced because the production of a sunflower follows the cessation of its seed, but an endlessly arising sunflower seed never ceases.

To this, the Samkhyas might reply that the sunflower exists in a non-manifest form at the time of its seed, and since it must arise to become manifest, there is no need for further

² For something “to attain its identity” (Tib. *rang gi bdag nyid thob pa*) as a particular phenomenon means that it becomes that phenomenon. Therefore, when a sunflower sprout, for instance, becomes a sunflower it “attains its identity” as a sunflower.

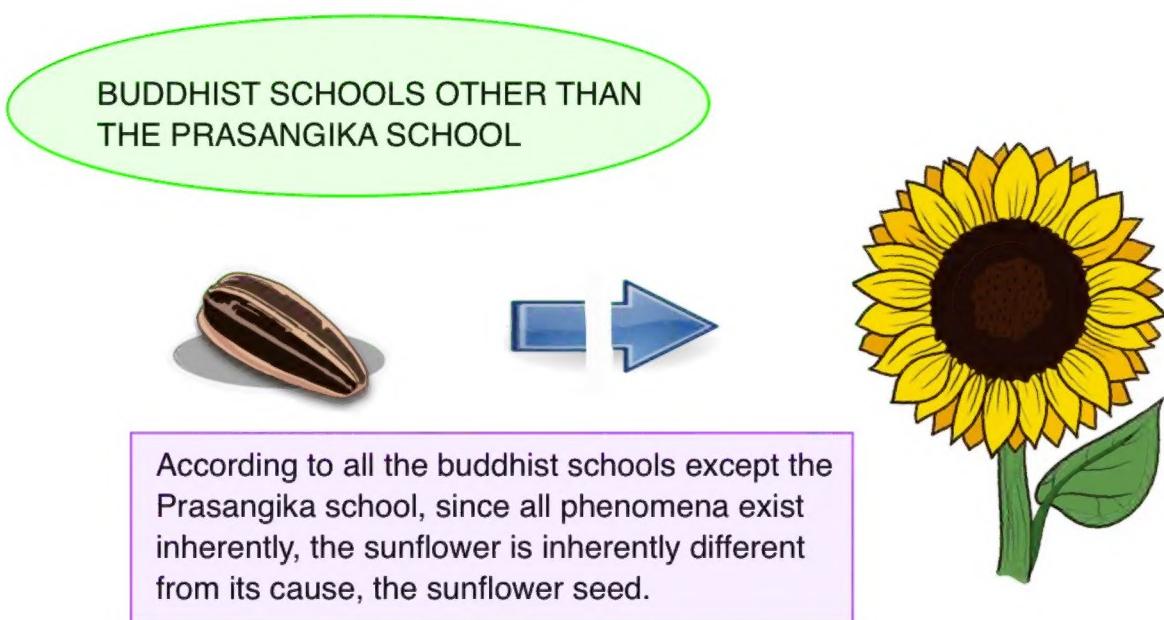
arising once it has manifested. However, this reply cannot rebut the previous logical absurdities, leading to the following argument:

If the sunflower were to exist at the time of its seed—even in a non-manifest form—it would not need to arise, for it had already arisen; and if it were to arise despite existing, infinite arising would ensue.

If, on the other hand, the Samkhyas were to say that the manifest sunflower did not exist at the time of its seed, they would be abandoning their original position and thus the view that something can only arise if it already existed at the time of its cause.

Arising from something different

The second possibility, arising from something else or from something distinct from itself, means to arise from an *inherently* different cause. This is asserted, for instance, by all buddhist philosophical schools other than the Prasangika Madhyamika school, on the view of which the *Fundamental Wisdom* is based. Inherent existence is asserted by the Vaibashika, Sautrantika, Chittamatra, and Svatantrika Madhyamika school. According to these buddhist systems, since all phenomena exist inherently, objectively and from their own side—for otherwise they couldn't exist—a result such as the sunflower arises from an inherently different cause, the sunflower seed.



Refutation of arising from something different

The refutation of arising from something that is different from itself is also based on pointing out the logical absurdities or consequences of this extreme way of arising:

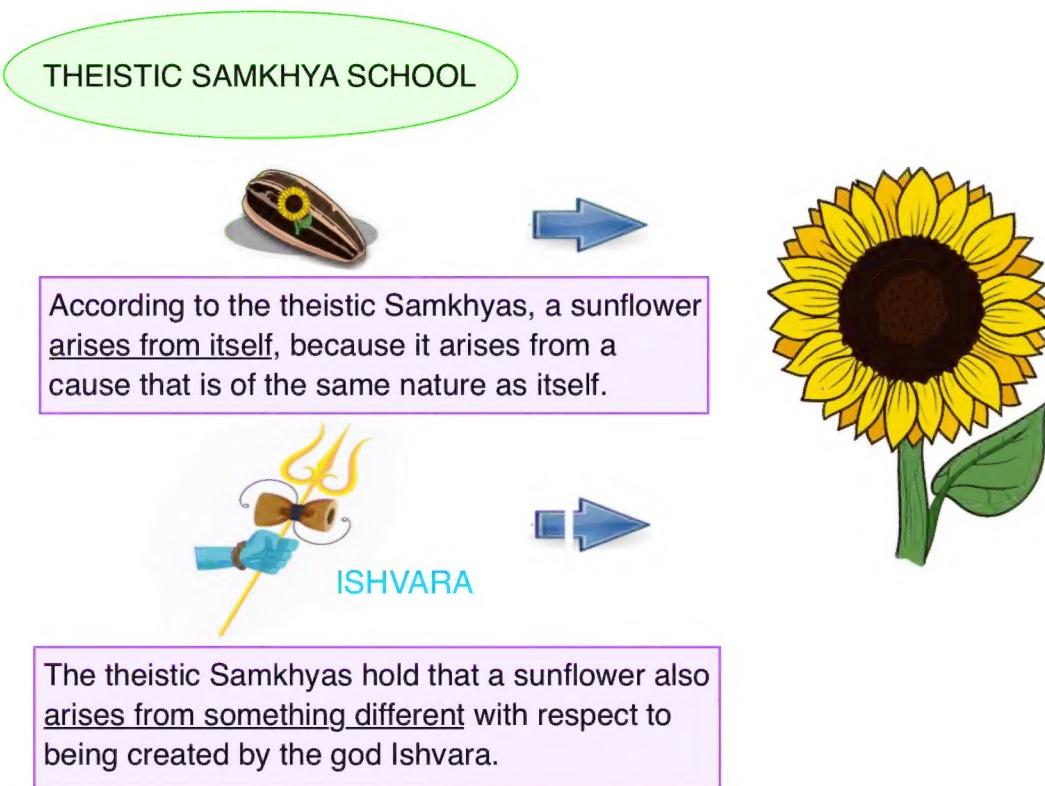
If a cause and its effect were inherently different, there would be no dependently or conventionally existent difference between them; a cause and its effect would be unrelated or disconnected phenomena. If an effect could be produced by a cause that was unrelated to it, an effect could arise from anything that is conventionally not considered to be its cause, because an effect would be equally unrelated to its cause and its non-cause. This would mean that a result such as a sunflower would arise not only from a sunflower seed but also from a rice seed, a piece of charcoal, or any other impermanent phenomenon that precedes it.

Therefore, from a buddhist point of view, since a cause and its result are mutually dependent, they are merely nominally or conventionally different.

Arising from both

This extreme way of arising refers to arising from both itself and something different; it is asserted by the ancient non-buddhist school of the theistic Samkhyas and the Jains.

Like the non-theistic Samkhyas, the theistic Samkhyas (Tib. *grang can lhar bcas pa*) maintain that a result such as a sunflower arises from a cause that is of the same nature as itself. Additionally, they hold that the sunflower is created by the god Ishvara and therefore arises from something different.



The Jains (Tib. *gcer bu ba*) assert that a sentient being arises from itself, because it is caused by the living being from the previous life that is part of the same continuum. The

living being of the present life also arises from something different, because it is the result of its karma and its parents, and so on.

Similarly, a clay pot arises from itself because it is the result of the clay, and it arises from something different as it is produced by a potter, a pottery wheel, and so forth.

JAIN SCHOOL



According to the Jains, a clay pot arises from itself, because it arises from clay that is of the same continuum as itself.



The Jains hold that a clay pot also arises from something different: a potter, a pottery wheel, and so forth.

Refutation of arising from both

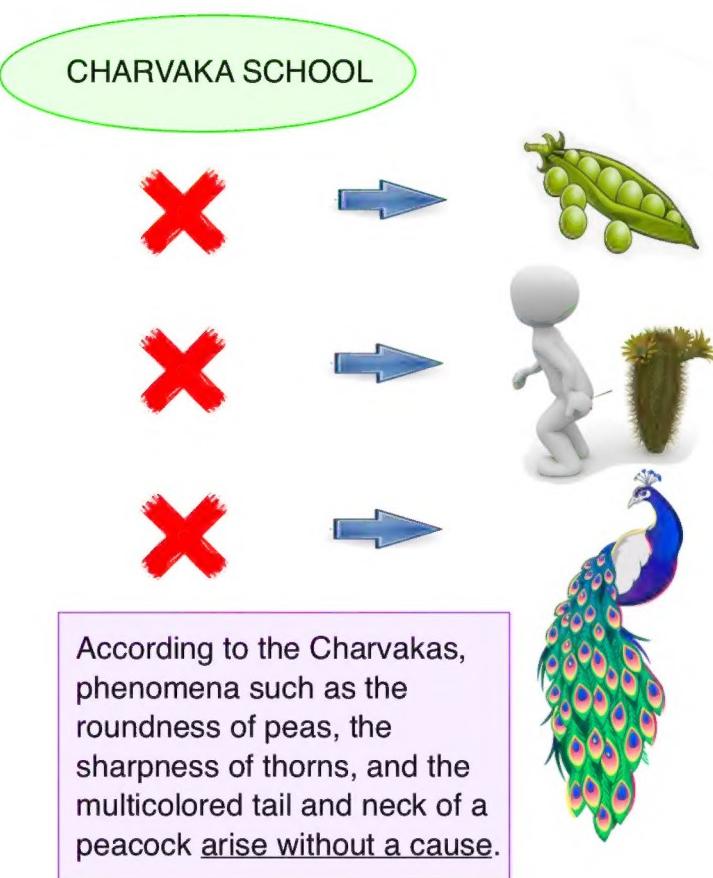
Arising from both is refuted by the same logical consequences that refute the first and the second extreme possibility.

Arising without a cause

The non-buddhist nihilistic school of the Charvakas (Tib. *rgyang 'phen pa*) asserts the fourth extreme possibility, arising without a cause.

Although the Charvakas accept the production from a cause because they hold that the making of a pot, for example, can be seen to occur in dependence on causes such as clay, a potter etc., they maintain that there are some phenomena that have no observable causes and conditions and therefore arise naturally without being produced by anything.

Examples are the roundness of peas, the length and sharpness of thorns, and the multicolored tail and neck of a peacock³.



Refutation of arising without a cause

The logical absurdities of arising without a cause are:

If there were things that arise without a cause, those things could arise from anything. Also, they could arise anytime, because they would not have to wait for their causes to be produced. The ripening of mangoes, for instance, would not occur at a specific time of the year since it would not depend on the seasons. Also, crows would have peacock feathers, and peacocks would possess parrot feathers, for none of those things would be dependent on any causes.

From a buddhist point of view, there are no impermanent phenomena that do not arise

³ Aryadeva says in his *Establishing the Reasoning that Refutes Mistaken Views* (Skt.

Skhalitapramardanayuktiheddhusiddhi, Tib. ‘*khrul pa bzlog pa'i rigs pa gtan tshigs grub pa*’:

“Also someone might say: All phenomena, the external and internal sources, are established from the entity itself, not from something different. The roundness of peas, the length and sharpness of thorns, the multicolored tail and neck of a peacock, the rising of the sun and the falling of water are established from the entity itself. They are not caused.”

from causes. The roundness of a pea arises from the same cause as the pea, the length and sharpness of a thorn arises from the same cause that produced the plant on which the thorn grew, and so forth.

As mentioned before, the four-part *diamond slivers reasoning* establishes the lack of inherent existence of arising. The emptiness of arising can be realized by means of the following syllogism:

“Regarding the subject, a sunflower, it doesn’t arise inherently, because (1) it doesn’t arise from itself, (2) it doesn’t arise from something different, (3) it doesn’t arise from both—itself and something different—and (4) it doesn’t arise without a cause.”

The tools to realize the emptiness of arising are the thorough realization of this syllogism and insight into the logical absurdities that would ensue if the sunflower or any other phenomenon were to arise inherently.

It is important to note, that not only the *object that is to be established* by the syllogism (“does not arise inherently”, i.e. the emptiness of arising) but also each of the four reasons of the diamond slivers reasoning (“doesn’t arise from itself, doesn’t arise from something different” etc.) are *non-affirming negatives*.

Non-affirming and affirming negatives

Phenomena can be categorized into (1) positive phenomena (Skt. *vidhi*, Tib. *sgrub pa*) and (2) negative phenomena (Skt. *pratiṣedha*, Tib. *dgag pa*). Positive and negative phenomena do not only refer to statements, propositions or acts of affirmation or denial but to anything that exists. Whatever exists is either a positive or a negative phenomenon and anything that is a positive or a negative phenomenon necessarily exists. Like the two truths, this division of phenomena is exhaustive; there is no third category.

The difference between the two categories is based on the manner in which phenomena are realized by conceptual consciousnesses. If a phenomenon is the main object of a conceptual consciousness that realizes the phenomenon by way of explicitly eliminating an object of negation, it is a negative phenomenon. An example is unhappiness. The conceptual consciousness perceiving unhappiness realizes its main object by way of explicitly negating happiness.

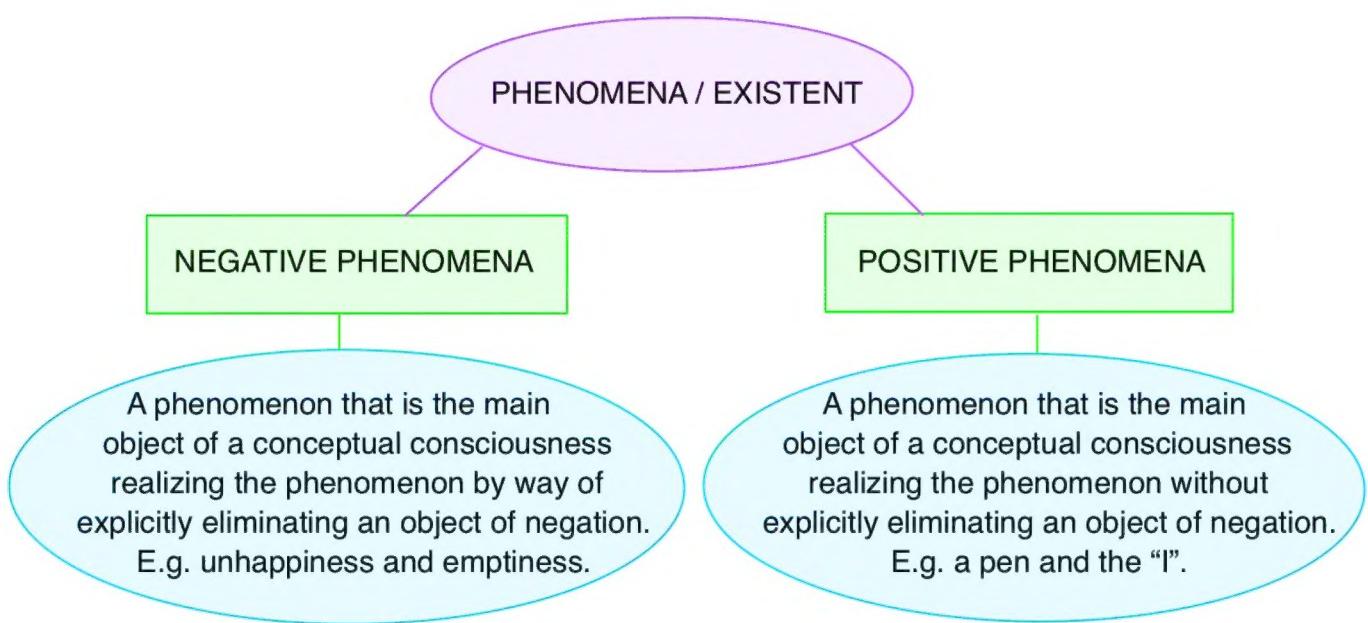
Another example is emptiness; the conceptual consciousness perceiving the lack of inherent existence realizes emptiness through explicitly eliminating inherent existence.

If a phenomenon is the main object of a conceptual consciousness that realizes the phenomenon without explicitly eliminating an object of negation, it is a positive

phenomenon. An example is a pen. The conceptual consciousness perceiving a pen realizes the pen without explicitly negating anything.

That doesn't mean that the conceptual consciousness apprehending the pen does not mentally eliminate an object of negation, for while a conceptual consciousness explicitly realizes its main object—the pen—the thought consciousness implicitly negates *not the pen*, that is, it implicitly excludes anything that is not the pen and in that way implicitly realizes *not not the pen* or the *opposite of not the pen*⁴.

Another example of a positive phenomenon is the “I”. The conceptual consciousness perceiving the “I” realizes the “I” without explicitly eliminating anything. It just implicitly eliminates *not the “I”*; it implicitly negates anything that is not the “I” and in that way implicitly realizes the *opposite of not the “I”*.



Negative phenomena can be classified into two types: (1) non-affirming negatives (Skt. *paryudāsa-pratiṣedha*, Tib. *ma yin dgag*) and (2) affirming negatives (Skt. *prasajya-pratiṣedha*, Tib. *med dgag*)

⁴ A conceptual mind that explicitly negates a phenomenon is equivalent to a conceptual mind that explicitly realizes that something is *not that phenomenon*. So, if a consciousness explicitly realizes that *x* is not *y*, it explicitly negates that *x* is *y*, and vice versa. The same is true for implicitly realizing an object. If a consciousness implicitly realizes that *x* is not *y*, it implicitly negates that *x* is *y*, and vice versa. For example, a conceptual consciousness explicitly realizing that a situation is impermanent explicitly negates that the situation is not impermanent (while implicitly negating that it is permanent and thus implicitly realizing that the situation is not permanent).

The difference between the explicit and implicit cognition of an object is that the object that is explicitly realized by a consciousness appears to that mind, whereas an object that is implicitly realized does not appear to the mind.

These two negatives are not described on the basis of the way they are realized by conceptual consciousnesses, but depending on whether or not the words used to express the negatives suggest or imply a positive phenomenon in place of their object of negation.

Non-affirming negatives

If something is a negative phenomenon and the term that expresses it does not suggest or imply a positive phenomenon in place of its object of negation, it is a non-affirming negative.

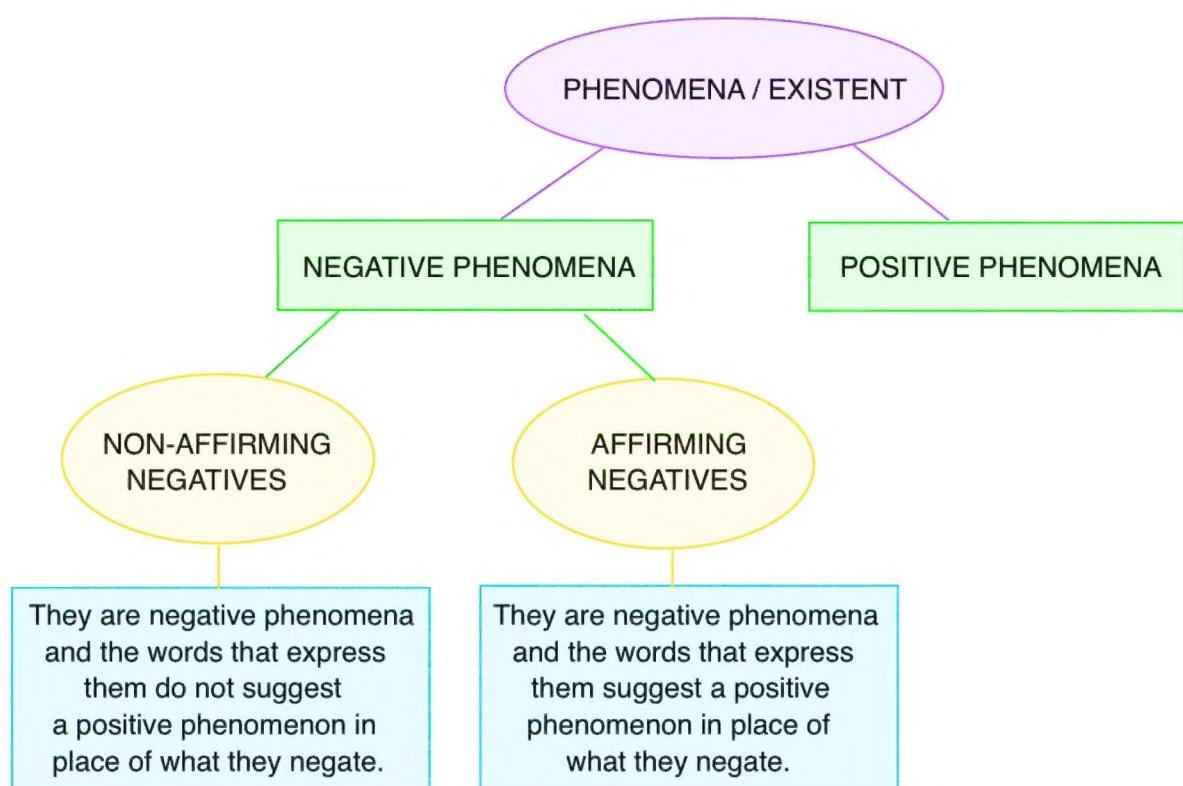
Examples are: *the eye consciousness is not physical* and *the lack of inherent existence of Jane*. They are non-affirming negatives because they are negative phenomena and the phrases “the eye consciousness is not physical” and “the lack of inherent existence of Jane” do not suggest a positive phenomenon in place of the verbal negation of the eye consciousness being physical and the inherent existence of Jane respectively.

Affirming negatives

If something is a negative phenomenon and the term expressing it suggests a positive phenomenon in place of its object of negation, it is an affirming negative.

An example is: *an unfriendly neighbor*. It is an affirming negative because it is a negative phenomenon and the term “an unfriendly neighbor” suggests a positive phenomenon—the neighbor—in place of what the words negate, i.e. his being friendly.

Another example is: *our body is not permanent*. This too is an affirming negative because it is a negative phenomenon and the words “our body is not permanent” suggest a positive phenomenon—our body’s impermanence—in place of what the words negate, permanence.



The scriptures describe four kinds of affirming negatives: Affirming negatives of explicit suggestion (Tib. *dngos su 'phen pa*), of implicit suggestion (Tib. *shugs la 'phen pa*), of both explicit and implicit suggestion (Tib. *dngos shugs la 'phen pa*), and of contextual suggestion (Tib. *skabs stobs kyi 'phen pa*).

Affirming negatives of explicit suggestion

An example of the first type is: *the existence of the lack of inherent existence of a chair*.

This is an affirming negative, and the words “the existence of the lack of inherent existence of a chair” explicitly suggest the existence of the emptiness of the chair.

Affirming negative of implicit suggestion

Fat Devadatta does not eat during the day is an example of an affirming negative of implicit suggestion, because the phrase “fat Devadatta does not eat during the day” implicitly suggests that Devadatta eats at night.

Affirming negative of both explicit and implicit suggestion

An example of this type of negative is: *Fat Devadatta does not eat during the day and exists as someone who is non-emaciated*. The words expressing this affirming negative implicitly suggest that fat Devadatta eats at night and explicitly suggest his existence as someone who is not emaciated.

Affirming negative of contextual suggestion

An example of the fourth type of affirming negative that is given in the scriptures is: *He is not of the Brahmin class*. Although in general, this is a non-affirming negative, in a particular context it is an affirming negative.

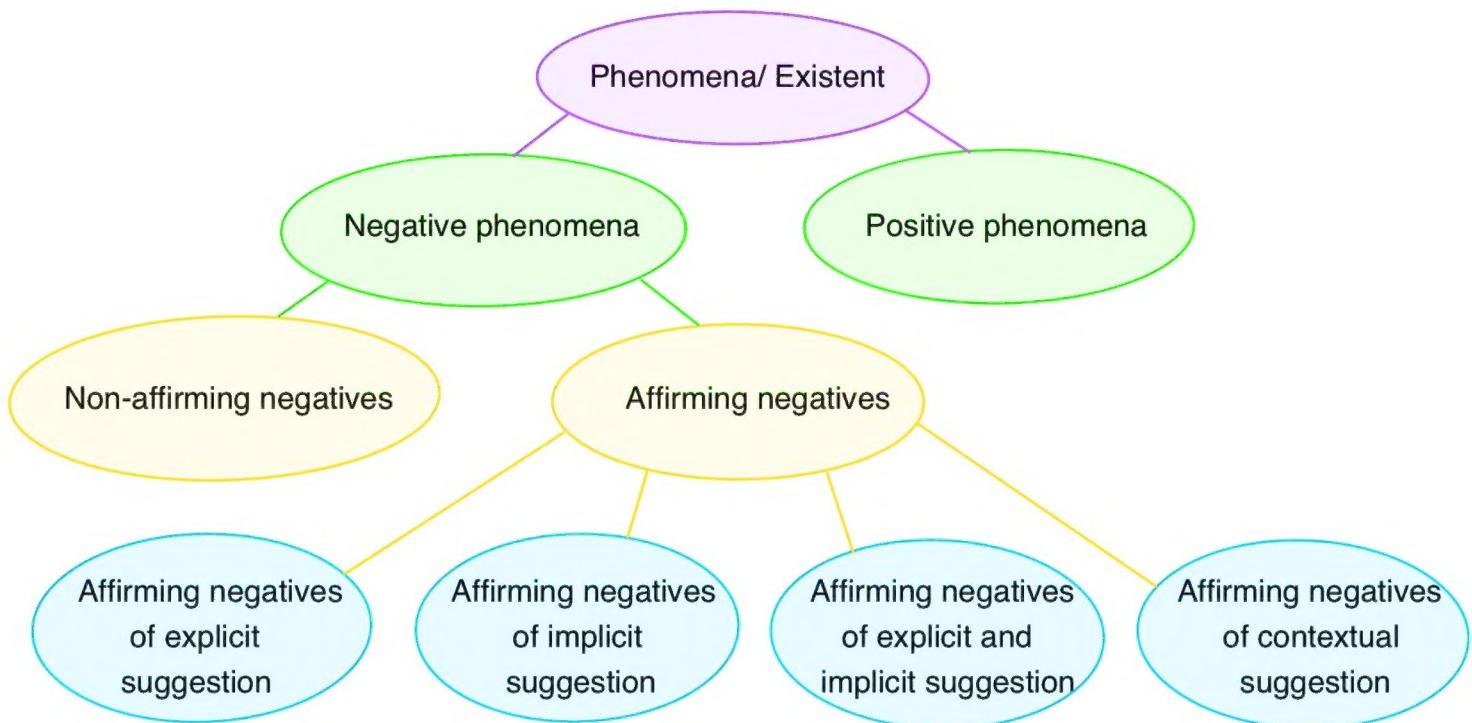
For example, if we have determined that someone like Buddha Shakyamuni is either of the royal class or the Brahmin class, but we have not determined which of the two classes he belongs to, the phrase “He is not of the Brahmin class” suggests that he is of the royal class by explicitly negating that he is of the Brahmin class.

Please note that there is a difference between negative phenomena such as (a) *the unemployed cook* and (b) *the cook is unemployed*, for the former is an affirming negative, while the latter is a non-affirming negative. In the case of *the unemployed cook*, the focus is primarily on the cook and the words “the unemployed cook” suggest the cook in place of negating that he is employed. In the second case—*the cook is unemployed*—the cook is merely the basis of his situation of being out of work and so the phrase “the cook is unemployed” does not suggest the cook or any other positive phenomenon in place of negating his being employed.

Similarly, (a) *John who lacks inherent existence* is an affirming negative, while (b) *John's lack of inherent existence* is a non-affirming negative.

John who lacks inherent existence refers to John himself. Although the words “John who lacks inherent existence” negate that John exists inherently they point primarily to a conventional truth, the person John. In contrast, the phrase “John’s lack of inherent existence”, primarily indicates an ultimate truth. It does not suggest John or any other positive phenomenon while explicitly negating his inherent existence; John is only mentioned as the basis of his emptiness.

To summarize the different types of negative phenomena:



It is important to understand that the four reasons of the *diamond slivers reasoning* (“does not arise from itself, does not arise from something different,” etc.) and what they establish —the lack of inherent existence of arising—are non-affirming negatives.

The four reasons of the *diamond slivers reasoning* are all non-affirming negatives, because, by negating the different extreme ways of arising without suggesting or implying a positive phenomenon, they do not reinforce the wrong view of reification.

The same is true of the emptiness of arising or the emptiness of any other phenomenon. If the negation of inherent existence were not so categorical that only the lack of inherent existence would be perceived by the mind that realizes emptiness, there would be reification, however faint and residual. This, in turn, would reinforce the root misperception and thus defeat the purpose of realizing emptiness, which is to undermine and progressively eradicate the self-grasping mind.

Therefore, for the negation of inherent existence to be most effective, emptiness must be a non-affirming negative that leaves no chance for the affirmation of a positive phenomenon and thus for a conventional truth.

Although the term “emptiness” does not suggest a conventional truth in place of negating objective or intrinsic existence, emptiness is compatible with conventional truths. In fact, the ultimate truth and the conventional truth with respect to a particular phenomenon are of one nature and therefore exist in dependence on each other. For example, a cup is a conventional truth and the cup and its ultimate truth are of one nature. Thus, the conventional truth, the cup, and the ultimate truth of the cup are inextricably linked so that one cannot exist without the other. Also, without first realizing the lack of intrinsic and objective existence of the cup, it is not possible to realize that the cup is a conventional truth.

Non-affirming negatives can be divided into two types: those the object of negation of which exists and those the object of negation of which does not exist. An example of the first type is *the mind is not a physical phenomenon* because its object of negation, a physical phenomenon, exists. An example of the second type is *emptiness*, because its object of negation has never existed, does not presently exist, and will never exist.

The realization of emptiness, therefore, is not a case of destroying something that once existed. Instead, it means to cognize a characteristic of phenomena, a negative attribute, that is the mere non-existence of a mode of existence that is impossible but that our mind constantly imagines to be the case.